



## Native Grass Series

Switchgrass

Big Bluestem

Little Bluestem

**Indiangrass**

Eastern Gamagrass

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United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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### Fact Sheet 4 Range and Pasture

# Native Grasses of Louisiana

## Fact Sheet

## Indiangrass

### Description

Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) is a warm-season perennial bunchgrass with short stout rhizomes and coarse stems. Leaves are blue to pea-green in color and the mature plants will average about 4 feet in height. It can be distinguished from other native grasses, even when plants are young, by its rabbit ear-like extension of the sheath. When mature, it has multiple, narrow plume-like golden seed heads. The leaves are long and taper at both ends. The seeds produce a striking gold color in late summer and early fall.

### Adaptability

Indiangrass is winter and drought hardy and somewhat acid tolerant. It is adapted statewide to all soil textures and drainage classes except those saturated for an extended period of time. Deep, well-drained soils are preferred. The varieties 'Lometa' and 'Cheyenne' are recommended for use in Louisiana but have not been extensively tested in the state.



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## Establishment

Planting can be done anytime between December and May when moisture and growing conditions are favorable. The optimum planting time is March 1 - May 15. It should be seeded into a well prepared, firm seedbed that is free of competition from other vegetation. The seeding rate for a monoculture is 7-10 pounds of Pure Live Seed (PLS) per acre. When seeded as a mixture, the rate is adjusted according to the desired percentage. Indiangrass seed is chaffy and will not flow through conventional drills. If unprocessed seed is used, the drill will require a fluffy

seedbox. Seeds can be debearded. This process removes much of the chaff and hair, allowing it to be seeded using conventional equipment. There are rangeland drills that can handle bearded seed. Use of a broadcast seeder, broadcasting seed by hand, and aerial seeding are acceptable methods of seeding where conditions permit seed to be placed in contact with mineral soil and where uniform seed distribution can be achieved. It will be necessary to use a cultipacker, press wheels or similar techniques following broadcast seeding to aid coverage of seed. Seed should be

planted  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch deep. Phosphorus and potassium should be applied according to soil test before or at seeding. Nitrogen fertilization should be delayed until seedlings have reached a height of 4 to 6 inches to prevent excessive use of fertilizer by competing vegetation. Fertilizer may not be needed due to the grass' ability to become established using natural soil nutrients even though they may be in very limited amounts. If weeds become a problem, the stand may be mowed when plants reach a height of 6-12 inches.

## Management

Controlling weeds in the establishment year is important. Indiangrass stands may seem slow to establish, but plants are persistent over a period of time. Do not graze newly established plantings of Indiangrass except when good stands are present. Indiangrass should not be grazed until it reaches 12 inches in height. During the growing season, rotational grazing is recommended. The cattle should be removed when the grass is grazed to a 6 to 8 inch height. However, it can be grazed continuously as long as a minimum height of 8-12 inches is maintained. Dormant stands can be grazed at any time during the winter. Indiangrass can be burned every 3-5 years to stimulate growth and reduce mulch accumulations. Avoid clipping or grazing Indiangrass 30 days before the first frost.

## Uses

Indiangrass can be used on critical area seeding, for roadside cover, and on areas subject to wind erosion. Indiangrass can be used singly or in mixtures for livestock forage on rangeland, pastureland, and hay land. It is excellent for wildlife habitat and food for deer. It provides excellent habitat for bird nesting and rearing. This species can

also be used in field borders and buffer strips.

### Where To Get Help

For more information about Indiangrass, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or visit following websites:

<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>

<http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov>



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